CIDAC TL4347
Centro de Documentação

INDONESIA AND EAST TIMOR

HON. DON EDWARDS
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 13, 1982

● Mr. EDWARDS of California. Mr. Speaker, on several occasions in recent years I have expressed great concern over the conflict prevailing in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. I have continued to stress the illegal nature of the Indonesian invasion and occupation of that territory and have called for American diplomatic moves that could help terminate the Indonesian occupation. I have noted that this tragic conflict may well have thus far claimed more than 200,000 East Timorese lives out of an original population of less than 700,000.

More than this, I have expressed my dismay over the diplomatic position taken by the United States. Far from helping to find a just solution to this tragedy, the United States has supplied Indonesia with vast quantities of military equipment in the years since Indonesia's 1975 invasion of the territory. The United States, disregarding the United Nations Charter which our diplomats helped to draft in San Francisco in 1945, has supported Indonesia in the U.N. votes on the Timor issue.

But the Congress has become more active on issues pertaining to East Timor, and I hope to see congressional involvement increase in the coming year.

There are others whose activity on the East Timor issue should increase dramatically, in my judgment. It should be recalled that until 1975, East Timor had been a Portuguese colony for 400 years. East Timor was dependent upon Portugal for protection against an Indonesian invasion. For whatever reason, Portugal failed to prevent the Indoniesian assault, and Portugal will continue to bear a heavy responsibility for this failure.

As I have noted in recent years, Portugal has at various times announced moves that could help bring a just settlement to East Timor. I have applauded these moves, while noting that the right of self-determination for the people of East Timor is an inalienable right that cannot be ignored.

On December 14, the current Prime Minister of Portugal, the distinguished newspaper editor Fransisco Pinto Balsemao, will meet with President Reagan in Washington. I believe that the Portuguese Prime Minister will raise the East Timor question with our President.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge all possible steps that can bring peace to East Timor within a proper legal framework scrupulously respecting the wishes of its inhabitants. Like Britain in the case of the Falkland Islands, Portugal has the capacity to conduct an active diplomacy on the East Timor issue. But concerning East Timor, where so many people have died fighting for their freedom from foreign domination, the responsibility of the former colonial power is all the more keen.

To inform my colleagues on the editorial opinions of two of our Nation's leading newspapers, I insert for the RECORD commentaries that have appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle and the New York Times:

[From the San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 13, 1982]

INDONESIA AND EAST TIMOR

The red carpet has been rolled out for Indonesian President Suharto's visit to Washington. At the welcoming ceremony, President Reagan told this leader of a nation of 13,500 islands that "the United States applauds Indonesia's quest for what you call national resilience. No nation in our era has shown itself more firmly committed to preserving its own independence than Indonesia . . ."

This is a fair statement that recognizes the importance of oil-rich Indonesia to United States foreign policy and to stability within the Southeast Asia region.

But there is a shadow that alls across Suharto's visit, and it is the shadow of Indonesia's conduct in East Timor. This former Portuguese colony was taken over by Indonesia in a bloody invasion during 1975, and reports that filter out from the island indicate it is still the scene of oppression and famine.

A bipartisan group of senators and representatives has urged the Indonesian government to allow international relief agencies free access to the area. It is also pressing President Reagan to open up the whole question of human rights on East Timor with President Suharto.

"We are deeply concerned," said the senators, "over the tragic situation in East Timor . . . Although events (there) have received comparatively little attention, that does not make past or present conditions . . . any less severe." The Congressmen say means should be found to convince Suharto to agree to an internationally-negotiated settlement that will guarantee Indonesia's "legitimate security interests" while providing the people of East Timor with the political rights to which they are entitled. Their position on this wrenching situation is a thoroughly reasonable one.

[From the New York Times, Oct. 9, 1982]

FORGOTTEN SORROWS IN TIMOR

Aggression forgotten is aggression rewarded. Because Britain could send a fleet to the Falklands, Argentina paid in bitter coin for its seizure of the islands. Indonesia had better luck seven years ago: it grabbed East Timor, a former Portuguese colony, and heard only token protest. The principle was the same but Indonesia's crime is nearly forgotten.

Yet not wholly forgotten. On the eve of President Reagan's meeting with Indonesia's President Suharto, a bipartisan group in Congress has asked America not to avert its eyes.

East Timor was indifferently governed from Lisbon for 400 years. Its half-million people, predominantly Catholic, were unprepared when independence was thrust upon them. But at worst, it was a slum; now it is a wasting prison. As many as 200,000 people may have perished under Indonesia's occupation. And the denials of ill treatment remain implausible as long as Jakarta refuses both free exit to Timorese and Portuguese nationals and unimpeded entry to relief organizations.

At the very least, Indonesia's rulers have to be persuaded to open the doors to East Timor. But there is nothing persuasive about a United Nations that regularly threatens Israel for much lesser transgressions while gently chiding Indonesia for the abduction of a whole people. And it does not help for the United States to mute its protest in gratitude for Indonesia's anti-Communism.

Protesting the situation in East Timor is not just a matter of arraigning a new nation for what the old colonial powers used to do with impunity. It is a way to help the United Nations and world opinion elevate standards of conduct. What other help is available to a remote and vulnerable people when their cause dwindles to a footnote?

Creditably, though tardily, Portugal is not shrugging. Prime Minister Pinto Balsemão reminded the General Assembly last week that he still cared. He appealed for using all mechanisms of the U.N. to find a remedy. Maybe the effort would fail. So far, it hasn't really been made.●

United States of America
Congressional Record
PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 97th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION
Vol. 128 WASHINGTON, MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1982 No. 146